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THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN GREAT BRITAIN.

BY THE DUKE OF ARGYLL.

“WE’RE going to form a Government of Examination and Enquiry,” were the words used by the statesman who was called in 1886 to face the demand of the Irish Nationalists for a separate national Parliament. For some time before, he had been considered by his friends as “leaning toward Home Rule.” The word has become nauseous, not only on account of the long political battle which has raged ever since as to the result of the policy signified by the phrase, but also on account of the doubt of what the phrase itself meant. Whether it meant management of district gas and water, or political separation founded on fancied lines of racial division; whether it was only a strictly guarded devolution of central power, or a surrender to men who hated that Government, none knew. All was conjecture.

It is necessary to go back fifteen years, to know how and why it is that a Government formed not on a conjectural platform, but one of tried and substantial planks, is in office. It is a Government not only in office, but in power, and with such power as has not been given before to any in England. Never before has a majority of 150 in the House of Commons followed the Government Whips’ requests for five years. Never before has that majority, on an appeal to the polls, been sent back with power and purpose undiminished.

This is the consequence of that dubious phrase of 1886, “We’re going to form a Government of Examination and Enquiry.” Examination and enquiry into what? Into that which all men who had given any study to politics knew already perfectly well. There had been no manner of doubt as to what the Irish separatists demanded. “The narrow sea forbids Legislative Union with England; the ocean forbids Separation,” was the most

friendly utterance toward England repeated by any responsible Irish Nationalist. But the majority declared they would have nothing but an Ireland ruled only by its own Parliament. It had been an ill-used nation in the past. It would be an ill-used nation now, if not allowed to have the laws of property and finance and representation altered to the views of the leaders of the Irish Democracy. The eighty Nationalist or separatist votes at Westminster would always be used to enforce the claim. It was only a question of time when an English statesman would be at the head of affairs with a precarious majority, and then the eighty votes "cast solid" must tell, and he must capitulate.

In 1886, they thought they had already found the man who would surrender. True, he had spoken all his life against such capitulation. But he was known to be imperious enough to desire power at the cost of surrender. Conscious of an almost divine purpose in all he did, why should it not be possible to convert himself, and England, to attempt that which surpassed the wit of man, and unite by disintegration? It only required enough time and enough talk! Would a separate House of Commons at Dublin crystallize antagonism? "Well, they say not—they say not." And so the great conjecture became in his mind the great, the almost divine, experiment. His friends, indeed, doubted, although it was almost blasphemy to doubt where he drove. To them came the words, "Examine and enquire. We're going to form a Government of Examination and Enquiry. We need not approach the Irish question for another year. A twelvemonth hence—next January!" And many followed into the darkness, groping and clinging to words, and believed in the twelve months' respite from embracing that which they and their chief had denounced through long years of patriotic verbiage. Oh, vanity of human, and even of Parliamentary, experts' "judgment"! Twelve months! No—in three months they had to swallow their principles, and produce their proposals to meet the demands of sedition!

That is what has ruled the situation ever since. It rules it now, although the immediate future is again shrouded in examination and enquiry. But the quest is now more for a new Leader, with an equal amount of indecision and an equal amount of captivating phrase. Several try the game of satisfaction of the eye or ear. Loud, sonorous music is played, and dexterous dancing

over the naked swords of difficulty is indulged in; and, like the dancer over the blades, great care is taken that not a little toe shall come into contact with realities. When rhetoric has done its work, in forming a party of enthusiastic generalizers, it will be time to "examine and enquire" into any policy which may be taken up. Some politicians are only happy, if, like the sea, they take any color that storm or sun may give to the sky above.

Men say that political memory is short; but it was impossible even for the most casual and careless to forget that these men had only been "Liberal" in the direction of constituting Ireland a separate nationality, at the end of lifetimes devoted to combating the Nationalist Irish claim. It was seen at once that the act was done for continued power, though cloaked in every fine phrase that could be drawn from the resources of casuistry and passion. It made England think that the party which could so surrender their convictions could not govern.

And it is to this idea, false or well-founded, that the strength of the Conservatives is due. Britain is at a time when men are required who can govern and know their own mind. The progress made in the expansion of the Empire through increase of trade, and the pushing of our people into new regions, has made it apparent that there must be no divided counsels allowed at home in speaking with those without the gate. The most intense jealousy and dislike have been nourished in foreign lands against us by the very fact of our successes. When their merchants have desired to push the protected trade of foreign countries, they have constantly found that the Union Jack had been carried to the places of vantage they desired to possess, and the free trade triple cross had found more favor than the tricolor bars. The best ports, the most coveted coaling stations, were already under the Union Jack. Somehow, also, though trade was subsidized by enormous grants from the foreign treasuries, and foreign capital and foreign flags were carried far, yet there was no flesh and blood behind these symbols. The men did not care to become colonists. If they went to countries beyond seas, it was not to carry with them their own laws and institutions and language, but to become Americans or Britishers, to speak English, and gradually to become citizens of Anglo-Saxon states or colonies. This fact alone is sufficient to account for much of the exasperation against England which one hears so often rising from the foreign press.

In private life, the poor do not care for millionaires who only use their riches to become yet richer. This was the rôle ascribed to Britain. The emigrants from the Continent go to her colonies, become rich in the commercial life of the Anglo-Saxon communities, and in a generation or two forget that they are Germans, or Dutch, or Swedes, or Norsemen, and, becoming naturalized, are lost to the lands of their fathers. Canadian Frenchmen have a sentimental feeling for old France, but their laws and institutions which they cherish, and which are secured to them in the Province of Quebec, are not the laws and institutions of modern France. Their richer citizens may revisit the places in Brittany and Normandy from which their fathers came, and may be attracted to Paris, but the language alone is like that they know as their own. The habits of the people, the genius of the centralized France which has absorbed the old Home Rule provinces of the north, or of Provence, or of Burgundy, or La Vendée, is quite different. Except in the Provinces separate of old, little of the religion they love is respected in the France of to-day. Canada is Catholic, loyalist, and peculiar. Modern France lives mostly apart from the Church, is all stamped with the Paris stamp, and responds to the feelings of a capital which has thrown off all monarchical ideas, all reverence for the past, and most of the fertilizing affection for laws that has made Canada prosperous, populous and reverent. It is not England who has known how to colonize, for her Government by its folly lost her greatest colonies in the United States. But it is the blended race inhabiting the British Isles which has known how to colonize, because, at home strong in freedom and populous with strength, it has spread wherever sail or steam could carry its sons, bearing with them the old love for the old laws, which were wrested from kings, and also from the Commonwealth of Cromwell.

This is the secret of the seeming miracle which has "painted the world red," and it is natural that envy and covetousness and the rivalry of governments should combine to dislike it, and to pour forth treasure in the attempt to do the like. It is not treasure, however, but the freedom of laws, that makes successful colonies, destined in time to be nations strong as the mother land.

Now, in this again, the men who became indifferent to Union under Legislature at home were found wanting in appreciation of the significance of their own extended Empire. Even Disraeli,

as a young man, caught the infection of indifference; but only for a moment. The burden of Empire, the cost of responsibility for those who seemed sometimes ungrateful for the protection accorded to them, the taxation involved in the maintenance of fleets bound to defend hundreds of thousands of miles of coast, far from England, weighed on these British politicians. How well I remember one of the most eminent of them asking, with some scorn, when a request involving some outlay was preferred, "Why, what is Canada—not 2,000,000 of people?" Yet this statesman had served at the head of the Colonial Office. He seemed not to have taken the trouble to look at Canadian progress since the time of his service, and remembered only the number of the population of that date, while it had grown from his recollection of two million to close upon five million.

The feeling among these politicians of the first half of the Queen's reign was practically this: "Let us, as soon as we may, get these expensive colonies to 'cut the painter' and shift for themselves. Why should our Budgets be weighted by their necessities?" It was the hand-to-mouth policy, the policy of the good of the moment only, which many believe to be the feature of democratic government. And yet, now that the Government of Great Britain is becoming hourly and daily more democratic, there is less of this sentiment observable than of old, when old Whigs and old Tories alike were becoming impatient of the expense of our children. To be sure, strength breeds respect, and a desire for friendship. But, when the young communities could give back little, it was natural that the parent land should sometimes grumble. Yet, in the main, the old land held by the younger. Some may think this came because the democracy was not able fully to assert the short-sighted interest of the day over the more abiding interests of the future. It may be difficult to persuade the "toiling masses" that any insurance for the future of the nation should come out of their pockets. Where men have little to spend, they wish their taxes to purchase immediate benefit. It is difficult for most governments to make the constituencies realize that distant lands have much in common with themselves, and that what seems a resultless expense to-day may prove to be money well laid out in a future unknown and conjectural. But the safety England has experienced against this danger of exclusion, selfishness and folly came from her own people. They

knew, in every hamlet and city, of the lives of their sons and brothers who had gone to the lands which now, as British Colonies, demanded sympathy, protection and union. Voltaire was a learned man who had seen men and cities. Yet he contemptuously spoke of the French American possessions as "a few acres of snow." What use was that to France? he asked. If he had been an Englishman with a family, some of whom had become pioneers in America, he would have known better. The English did know better. Where there was British blood, there was the ever-enduring British bond. And so, over the learning of the wise and the misgivings of clever politicians, prevailed the wider knowledge, born of the Imperial instincts of the people. They knew that their children's states were to them so much money at credit to be called in "against a rainy day." They even had forbearance with a British weakness shown by the younger peoples, a weakness strangely enough born of their own strength. This was the tendency to be unprepared for war. It was the fault of placing too great a confidence in themselves, and believing that when they exerted themselves it would be sufficient to place untrained British levies against the more highly trained forces of other countries. That is a most dangerous fault, which England has not now outgrown, and which is painfully apparent among her sons over sea. They may, one and all, have to pay most dearly for it. It has been illustrated very recently both in the United States and in England. One of the vast benefits of recent wars is that they have largely tended to dissipate this fault and folly.

It is a curious accident, but it has its significance, that the last "Liberal" Government owed its fall to the unpreparedness of the War Office in the matter of warlike stores. The supplies have been ridiculously inadequate, owing to the parsimony of the Treasury. Each War Minister in turn, no matter of what party, could have got the House of Commons to vote the money for whatever he declared to be necessary. But the "false shame" of shrinking from embarrassing colleagues by asking too much of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, or of demanding what at all events might seem too much, has influenced successive ministers at the head of the Military, and, to a lesser degree, also, at the head of the Naval Department. The constant changes in ordnance, owing to the rapidity with which invention succeeded invention, has hin-

dered ministers at the head of these departments for national defense from recommending the use of vast sums on weapons which another year might render obsolete. There has not been in England the perpetual likelihood of imminent war which has kept Continental nations up to date in these matters. Take, for instance, the case of the so-called Creusot guns, lately used by the Boers. Those guns were made by Manchester machinery, offered to the British Government, declined by them, and then sold to the Schneider-Canet Company of Creusot, and resold by them to the Boers. The Boers knew how to use them by paying for Dutch, German and French artillerymen; and they have given the British a most valuable lesson in the mobility of guns which are classed by artillerymen of the English army as "guns of position." But the British artillery was good, having been brought "up to date," and was able to hold its own with guns of its own class. It was in the stores of ammunition for all guns and in the lack of movable guns of position that the British weakness lay. Now, for this the tone of the party which believes that it can get on without any warfare, except that which it may wage at home against the wealthier classes, is to blame in the first degree. Their opponents are also to blame, in a less degree, because it is not from their own ranks that opposition to war votes and money votes usually arises. "Whenever the Tory party are in for a few years," say the Liberals, "taxes increase, because wars come." It is the standing gibe of their platforms. To meet this, the Conservatives have not always been able to harden their hearts against a false economy. The Navy, in this last war, was supplied with the proper amount of ammunition, and with good guns. The Army had good guns, but only of one class, and very little ammunition. We may confess this now that the danger is past, and the thanks of Britain are due to Mr. Krüger and Co. for giving us so useful an object lesson. Never in our generation, and probably for a much longer time, will England have to go begging every firm of founders to work night and day to supply projectiles and ammunition of all sorts.

Whether the war will make any change in administrative rules, in regard to allowing the nation to know the wants of the Navy or Army by other channels than those of the civil representatives of the services in the Cabinet, is another matter. The press, and the professional soldiers and sailors, are always anxious to have

the supply of all arms sufficient. But the official mouthpieces of Fleet and Army are the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Secretary of State for War—civilians both of them—who have struggled through a political campaign with the First Lord of the Treasury, and have a fellow feeling with him in his difficulties in calling on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to provide sums which will be objected to by the Opposition in the House of Commons. It is not easy to justify increased armaments, unless there be a war or a war scare. The Military and Naval people who are in office are not in power. They must remain dumb, and be represented or misrepresented by the politicians. They have only one resource, and that is to resign, which requires far more courage than what is to them a trifle, namely the facing of the fire of an enemy. A Naval Lord or Commander-in-Chief must be a very convinced person before he makes up his mind to become by resignation a very impecunious one. Besides, if he did make a martyr of himself, would he do any good? Would the public understand him, and follow him? Would he not be only sacrificing himself and amusing the public and his opponents? If the politician placed in office above him says there is enough preparation against an enemy, and he says there is not, would not the politician have most weight, and his sacrifice be rendered vain? The professional sailors at the Admiralty have more chance than have the professional soldiers at the War Office, because the sailors form a board of experts, who have to be consulted, if not obeyed, and their resignation *en masse* would produce an impression on the public. But at the War Office there is no Consultative Board of soldiers, and each military expert is carefully locked up in his own pigeon-hole, whence he is expected only to coo as the Secretary of State desires. It is a question, in regard to such paramount national interests as those of defense, whether it should not be permissible for a unanimous expression of the opinion of the professional men in both Admiralty and War Office to be made public through some channel other than the mouth of the Parliamentary representative of the Department. If the politician disagreed, he could still say so, and advance reasons besides the mere question of cost, against the spending of the money advised by the professional representatives at the Offices as necessary for national exigencies. In the United States, there is the President to decide between politicians and the service men. In Germany,

there is the Emperor. In Russia, there is the Czar. In Britain, there is nothing, not even a scandal!

The British public cannot know if it be in danger or not, except—and this is a large exception—except for the opinions of men of mark recorded in the press. This is a good but slowly acting medicine, and the effect of press censure may come too late. Official reticence may prevent the press from knowing the truth. Editors cannot always be investigating ammunition boxes.

The mighty wave of warlike enthusiasm which swept over the Empire when it was seen that foreign intrigue, reactionary ignorance and oligarchical exclusiveness had challenged British institutions in South Africa, has filled the ranks, so that 250,000 men have been put under arms at the Cape, and all the barracks in Great Britain are bursting with red coats, anxious to change their scarlet for khaki for service at the front. All the important colonies have contributed to this array in Africa. The Government boast that such a thing has never been done before, that this sending of over 200,000 men seven thousand miles from Scotland to Lydenberg is a feat unequalled in the history of warfare. So it is. But rather accidentally. We have had the advantage of a free sea, an unopposed landing, excellent harbors, and a time of peace and successful commerce, when any “tramp” ship was certain to arrive at her destination, and there was less difficulty in shipping eight or ten Army Corps to the Cape than there was at the time of the Peninsular War in sending a thousand men to Lisbon. This immunity from annoyance in shipping troops cannot always be depended on. What may be depended on is the constant help of the colonies, so long as the war that excites their desire to aid the mother country is a war like this war, a struggle to put down antagonism to the free institutions on which they are determined to have the Empire founded, if there is to be an Empire at all. Cunning and contempt of their neighbors may have been exhibited in connection with ignorance and dogged bravery before these qualities were shown by the Boers. But these qualities must, it is felt by all free English communities, be licked into another shape, if they are to be of service to the world at large. There is a considerable section of the British Liberal party audible at all elections who hate all war, and this war in particular; and yet you find that the very men who go out and away from England with these ideas, and voyage to South Africa,

come back or write back recanting all their former opinions. Judging on the spot, they see that there was no other course but to resist the Boer invasion of the British Colonies, and that there is no other means of insuring peace and diffusion of education and freedom to whites and blacks, but the ending of the cause of the outbreak—that is, the ending of the separate, backward nationalities sought to be made strong by the discovery of the gold mines, and to be fostered in antagonism to English and American institutions. But the party hostile to the war, and who are unable to see its necessity, will remain wringing their hands at their own people, and extending the same hands to take those of the enemy, in spite of all demonstration of the falsity of the sentiment they cherish. The same men will always protest against “bloated armaments” at home, and they will resist, as far as they can, any taxation of the people for the maintenance of a good army capable of holding its own against an enemy landed in England. Their opposition is not to be despised, for we all believe in the fleet, which is supposed to be not only invincible but omniscient. It is probable that they would not be pleased if the Colonies took in future the same view, and regarded their contribution to the Navy as quite sufficient, in case of any threatened maritime combination against England. Britain, if she keeps up a fleet equal to any two of her rivals, cannot keep up a fleet equal to three or four other fleets combined. We have had combinations against us as strong. We have new combinations of Science, as well as of multitudes, to consider, as forces to be possibly arrayed against us. We must only work so that if such combinations are made, we may also combine with our Anglo-Saxon kinsfolk, to keep alive our power and our prolific gospel of the expansion of free laws and popular government.

Whether such cohesion and common appearance in arms will be effectual in securing sufficient numbers to enforce these principles of freedom, when challenged by really powerful enemies, is a very difficult question to determine. We have no reason to doubt that the Anglo-Saxon peoples can enforce these views, if they are determined to do so. Each year strengthens them in population and in resource. The weakness Britain and other Anglo-Saxon peoples equally show in the want of the trained men without whom an army is a mob, is being slowly remedied “at home.” New batteries of artillery are being formed. Heavier armaments

are being placed in forts. The cavalry is by no means adequate. Transport and commissariat for all but a handful of regulars are sadly wanting. We can look only on the Navy among our forces as being really "fit." But if it can do anything, it cannot go everywhere. It is probable that we must tax those who desire a life of ease, and who, although physically fit, will not give any time to training in any of the armed forces of the country. Each party meanwhile shuns proposing anything which may be called, however remotely, by the name of conscription. We still want a really good scare to enable us to possess an effective army in the modern meaning of the word. "*Non Angli, sed Angeli*," may be said of any Government which shall do this without the help of a scare. But here again, as on so many points vital to national existence, it is not the party now discarded by the constituencies who are the likeliest ever to be regarded as Britain's guardian angels.

British relations toward Continental Powers are less threatened by any Government that leaves the peculiarities of these Powers alone and "takes them as they come," than by one which fusses because they are not like ourselves, as was often the case under less prudent administrations, which characterized one people as "unspeakable," and another by language which had to be withdrawn and apologized for.

The Eloquence of Denunciation is a danger. Indeed, too great eloquence in any responsible statesman is a perilous luxury. It delights the audience, thrills for a moment the public, and then, like even the best whiskey, is apt to be succeeded by a chill which is the penance for the passing exhilaration. The greatest orators are usually the worst political guides. Judgment is necessary for affairs. A man who has enough imagination to be supremely eloquent is not in a condition to have his judgment firmly seated. His own phrases, struck from burning indignation or its imitation, have too extended a reach. If taken seriously, the praise or dispraise exalts or abases in a degree which becomes in practice outrageous. The majesty of perspective is lost in the intoxication of phrase and passion. The speaker who sways a crowd with the melody of his sentences is too apt to have none of his sweet notes for the equal scales of Justice. His burning words may be good to incite to war, or during a contest, but are not of the essence of that economy in all things which is desired

by good Liberals. Luckily, we have now scarcely any rhetoricians. We have many business men on both sides, especially if lawyers may be considered men of business. Our orators are laudably dull. Our good talkers are in the ascendant.

Will the great majorities last—or for how long? Who can tell? The side represented by the vast majority of to-day is the same side that was represented by the vast majority of the last five years. It means union. It means no Separatist nonsense, and yet it has not interfered with the machinery of separation. It has not proposed to cut down the representation of the Irish secessionists by one vote, although they now have a ridiculous disproportion to the population represented respectively by English and Irish members. A Nationalist obstructs all proceedings of the House in the name of five hundred illiterates. An Englishman may represent 50,000 intelligent people, and is of no more weight than the Nationalist. Can such disproportion continue? The Union Government has not interfered with it. When the legislature of Ireland was merged with that of England, the representation was arranged on the basis of respective population in each country. This has all changed, and Irish Nationalists boast that, whereas at the time of the Legislative Union no British constituency could be influenced by Irish votes, now over thirty can be turned any way by the Separatist leaders. The conditions have totally changed, and yet the Nationalists are allowed to be “cock of the dunghill” at home, and to rule thirty British dunghills as well. What patience on the part of the Unionists!

Again, in the matter of social legislation, taxes on succession to property have been raised, so that men who paid £5,000 have now to pay from £40,000 to £45,000, and country gentlemen cannot live in their houses or give the same employment as before; and yet nothing of all this has been repealed by the Unionist Chancellor of the Exchequer. On the contrary, social legislation is all against capital, all in favor of labor, whether that means a withdrawal of that capital on which labor must exist, or not. Only at general pensions to all men and women at sixty-five does the Union Government hesitate. Trade flourishes. Revenue and Empire grow. But there are not enough trained white men to defend them on land, or to man the ships built to guard them by sea.

ARGYLL.